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VOLUME XI | YEAR 2

ON RECORD

Elisia and Gehlee of UNIS, YARA on blending P-pop and hip-hop

ON THE RISE

AHOF's JL Gaspar, GAT, and 1621

Flag-bearers

ALAMAT: LEADING THE NEXT WAVE OF PINOY POP STARS

P250

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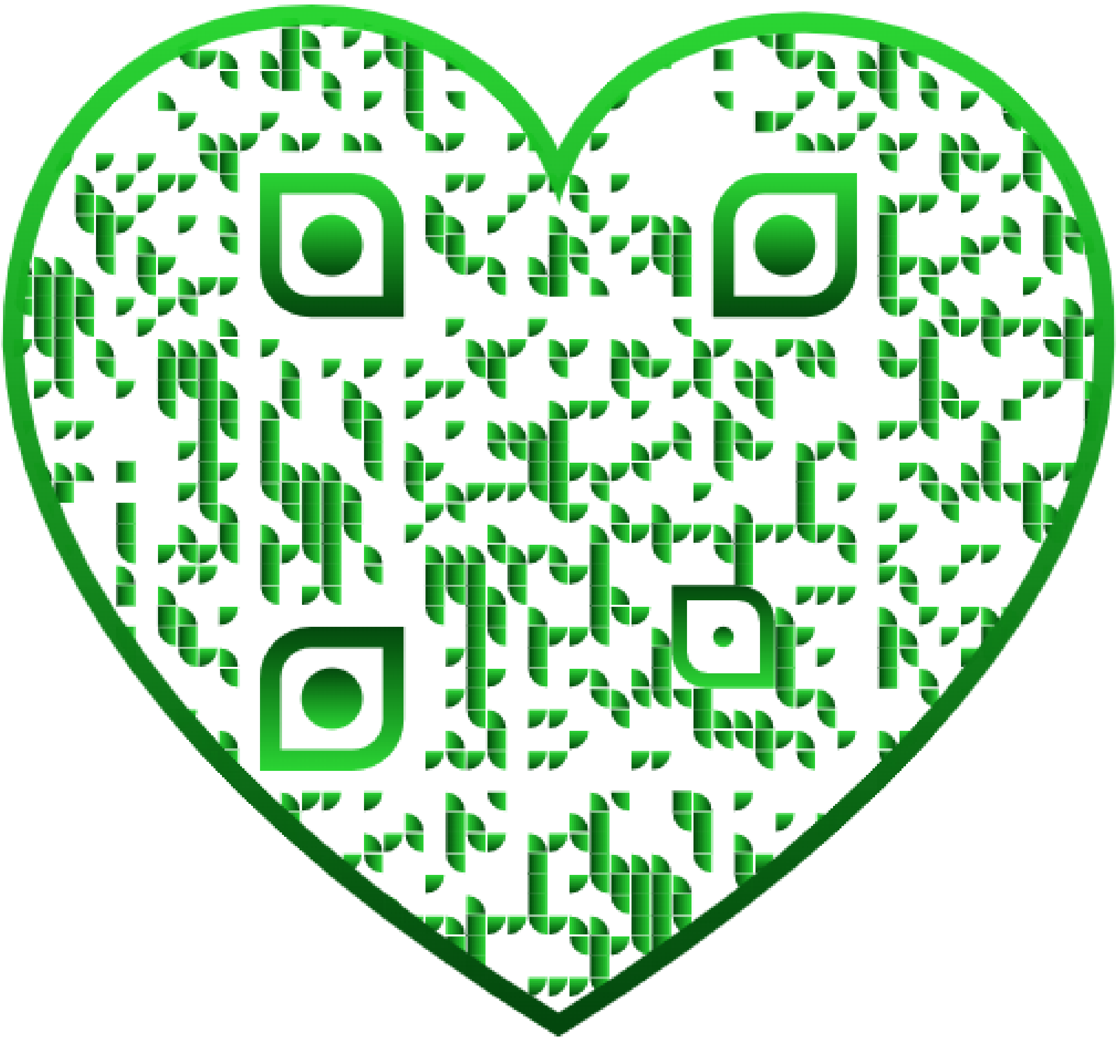

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Editor's Note

A New Cultural Revolution

NOT TOO LONG AGO, we launched *Billboard Philippines'* maiden issue with the Kings of P-pop, SB19. A year later we would celebrate our Anniversary issue with the Nation's Girl Group, BINI. Now, in the year 2025, both groups have sold out Philippine Arena and are embarking on world tours. The speed in which the genre has grown and gained acceptance in the country and beyond is truly remarkable and calls for celebration.

P-pop Rise is a battle cry to love modern P-pop for what it is — a reflection of Filipino culture and identity. The best of P-pop celebrates the Philippines and showcases to the rest of the globe our culture, identity, and world-class talent.

The doors have been opened and the stage has been set for new acts to break through. In this issue we celebrate the exciting future of P-pop through the music, the artists, and the movement as a whole.

Bret

BRET JACKSON

PHILIPPINES billboard VOLUMES

Morissette Explores Her Cebuana Heritage to Shape a Distinct Mark in Her Career

Billboard Philippines Volumes

Oct 31 • 28 min

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALEXIS DAVE CO

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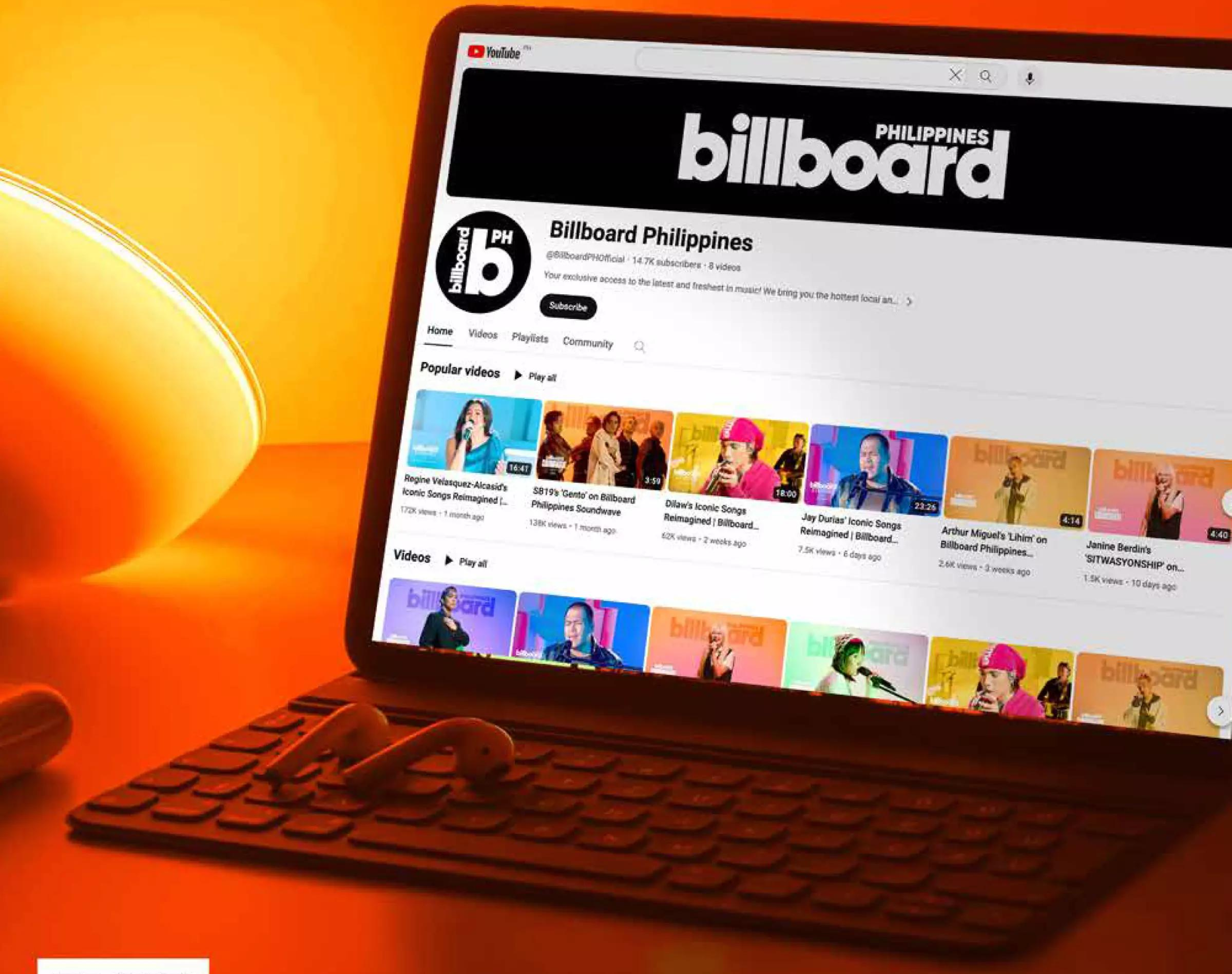
A new era of P-pop is upon us — with ALAMAT and G22 at the forefront, coming to claim the success they deserve

billboard PHILIPPINES STUDIOS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P-pop Out From The Crowd

1 BINI Cherry On Top Organic Bucket Hat
2 Bench X SB19 Men's Twill Overshirt
3 BINI Lightstick **4** BINI Cherry Crewneck Sweatshirt **5** SB19 Elesbi Lightstick V4
6 BINI Cherry On Top Oversized T-Shirt
7 BINI Enamel Pins **8** BINI Blink Twice Tote **9** BINI Blink Twice Tumbler
10 Bench X SB19 Men's Wide-Leg Jeans
11 SB19 WYAT Photobook

It's common knowledge that music fans everywhere express their fandom by collecting (and wearing) the official merchandise of their favorite artists. P-pop fans are certainly no exception, as many of them consistently — and proudly — flaunt their devotion to their favorite group by not only going to shows, but also getting their hands on as much merch as possible, from shirts and lightsticks to miscellaneous (but useful) items like tote bags, tumblers, and more.

It's no surprise then, that the country's leading P-pop acts — SB19 and BINI — offer a wealth of licensed goodies that fans can wear and bring along to show support for their idols. Longtime A'TINs and BLOOMs will most likely already own most of these, but if you've just hopped on the P-pop bandwagon, here are some great pieces to start with. b

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Twice

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11

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on record

Superwomen In Seoul: UNIS' Gehlee And Elisia

One year into their career with one of K-pop's rapidly rising acts, the two Philippine-born idols discuss their journey with the group so far and waving the Filipino flag high on the global stage

BY MAYKS GO

WHEREVER YOU PLACE FILIPINO TALENT, it is always bound to stand out and shine bright. And if there's one thing that Gehlee Dangca and Elisia Parmisano of UNIS have done, it's to become living proof of this very fact.

From UNIS' formation on *Universe Ticket* to their present-day stardom, the two homegrown artists have consistently showcased top-tier excellence, proudly wearing their Filipino heritage while doing so.

Whether it's diving headfirst into the realities of being in a K-pop group or adjusting to a totally different culture, Gehlee and Elisia have boldly taken on every challenge that has come their way, backed by the support of their fellow members and their fans, the EverAfters. Together, the two young idols are opening new doors, confidently showing the rest of the world exactly what Filipino artistry is made of.

It's been a year since UNIS made their official debut, and in that time, both Gehlee and Elisia have grown not only as artists but as individuals forging their paths far from home. When asked to reflect on their journey so far, the two recall how much has changed since their early days — particularly how their bond with their fellow members has deepened. The growing familiarity and trust have made their shared experiences feel more natural, more like home. "We've just gone through so much together," Gehlee shares, noting that the language barrier — once a daunting challenge — has all but disappeared thanks to their dedication to learning Korean. Elisia adds that the group has grown so close that their late-night conversations now flow endlessly, shifting from topic to topic in the way only true friends can manage.

Before the debut and the dazzling lights of center stage, however, there was *Universe Ticket* — a whirlwind of auditions, survival rounds, and adjustments. For two young girls from the Philippines, the experience was as surreal as it was challenging. "Ellie and

PHOTOS COURTESY OF F&F ENTERTAINMENT

> “I want to leave behind a message of hope, especially for all the young Filipinos who dare to dream big”
>
> GEHLEE

I stuck together whenever we could,” recalls Gehlee. In a space dominated by rapid schedules and cultural shifts, their bond became a quiet anchor. Even in the most overwhelming moments, being with someone who shared the same roots brought them back to their purpose: to represent the Philippines with pride.

For Elisia, joining a reality competition in South Korea was a leap far beyond her comfort zone. Not only was she unfamiliar with the intense competitive environment, but being away from her family and immersed in an entirely different culture presented a steep learning curve. “I’m not actually a competitive person,” she says with a laugh. “So even just joining a survival program out of the country was already a huge step.” Still, having her *Ate* Gehlee by her side gave her strength. Together, they weathered the emotional ups and downs with courage and a sense of shared purpose.

And while their talent undoubtedly played a key role in their success, both girls are quick to point out how their Filipino upbringing helped shape the artists — and people — they are today. “A big part of who I am comes from my Filipino roots,” Gehlee says with certainty. “Growing up in a warm, family-centered culture taught me to be confident yet grounded, to work hard and greet people with love and light.” That mindset, she adds, is something she carries into everything she does — whether she’s rehearsing choreography, facing fans, or persevering through a tough day.

Elisia agrees, pointing to the traits that she believes define her as a Filipina: *pakikipagkapwa-tao* (equal regard for others), confidence, and an unwavering loyalty to her craft. “These traits really help us on this journey,” she says. For both young idols, their heritage isn’t just a part of who they are — it’s the foundation that keeps them rooted even as they soar.

Representing the Philippines in the world of K-pop comes with its own unique set of emotions. There’s pride, yes, but also a quiet pressure — the awareness that every performance, every moment in the spotlight, is a reflection of where they come from. And yet, rather than being daunted by the weight of it all, both Gehlee and Elisia approach it with joy. “Whenever I really stop to think about it, my heart starts to race — not from pressure, but from pure excitement,” Gehlee admits. For her, it’s about sharing her culture and everything she’s learned from it with a wider audience.

For Elisia, the fear disappears the moment she steps on stage. “When I’m performing, I just enjoy myself,” she beams. “Because I really love what I’m doing. And I know *Ate* Gehlee feels the same way.” That love radiates in every performance, a testament to their sincerity and drive.

When asked if they see themselves as trailblazers, both girls pause — not out of modesty, but out of deep reflection. For Gehlee, the answer is yes. And the reason? The letters. Fan letters from young Filipinos who share how much they’ve been inspired by their journey. “It sincerely brings me so much joy,” she says. “Knowing that through our story, we’re able to bring K-pop closer to home and maybe inspire others to reach for the same dream.”

It’s this sense of responsibility — not as a burden, but as a blessing — that keeps them grounded and motivated. To those who dream of making it on the global stage, they offer heartfelt advice: to dream big, stay grateful, and never forget where you come from. “There’s absolutely nothing you cannot achieve,” says Gehlee. “Dreams like these take a lot of patience and heart, but the most wonderful things happen when you stay true to who you are.”

Elisia echoes the sentiment, emphasizing the importance of seeing the good even in hard times. “It really helps me overcome challenges,” she says. “It makes what you do even more fun.” Their advice is simple but sincere — words shaped by their own experiences and the hopes they carry for those who look up to them.

As they look toward the future, both girls have big dreams — not only for themselves but for UNIS as a group. Elisia hopes to make even more people happy with what she does, to expand the joy she already feels she’s able to bring. With UNIS, she envisions growth, maturity, and becoming artists that people can admire — not just for their talent, but for their heart.

SWEET AND SPICY Gehlee and Elisia reach for the stars in South Korea while staying grounded in their Filipino roots, leaving their very own unique mark on K-pop

Gehlee, on the other hand, dreams of reaching more hearts through music, not just as a performer but as a person who can bring comfort and light to others. And as a Filipino artist, she hopes to collaborate more, make meaningful connections, and continue to prove that someone from where she comes from can stand on global stages with pride. “I want to leave behind a message of hope,” she says. “Especially for all the young Filipinos who dare to dream big.”

Because if there’s anything Gehlee and Elisia have shown us so far, it’s that dreams — no matter where they’re born — can reach the stars.

GAT PHOTOGRAPHED BY DOOKIE DUCAY. 1621 PHOTO COURTESY OF ABS-CBN MUSIC AND PPL ENTERTAINMENT INC.

Next In Line: How Rising Groups GAT And 1621 Represent The Next Generation Of P-pop

Viva Artists Agency and Star Pop are at the forefront of P-pop's new wave, with young, capable acts who are more than ready to take on the evolving Filipino music scene

BY ROME SAENZ

P-POP HAS PROVEN TIME AND AGAIN that it's more than a passing wave — it's an unstoppable force redefining the sound and identity of Filipino music. As the genre continues to gain traction both locally and globally, the spotlight now turns to the new generation of P-pop acts poised to shape its future: Viva Artists Agency's GAT and Star Pop's rising boy group, 1621.

Despite being in the early stages of their career, GAT have already built one of the most buzzworthy pre-debut trajectories in recent memory. Composed of Ethan David, Charles Law, Michael Keith, Derick Ong, and Hans Paronda, the five-member group stands as the newest sibling act to legacy names like ALAMAT and the iconic SexBomb Girls.

Their breakout moment came with their electrifying revival of MMJ's 2013 track, "Daleng Dale," which was reimagined as the theme for the hit web series *Ang Mutya Ng Section E*. What began as a spontaneous creative pivot turned into a viral hit. "'Daleng Dale' was not part of the repertoire, supposedly," revealed Viva Artists Agency's Assistant VP for Marketing, Jean Agor, in an exclusive interview with *Billboard Philippines*. "I think back then, we were getting some TikToks [of people using the song]. I mean, not a lot of people were using it, but some people were already using the original version."

With that, GAT was ushered into the studio to craft a version of "Daleng Dale" that would quickly become an international earworm. But behind their infectious anthem is a collective of individuals already well-versed in performance. Ethan David was a child star and vocal competitor by age eight, Michael Keith came from a background in U.S. commercials for Nickelodeon and Disney, and Charles Law was also a seasoned actor. Derick and Hans, meanwhile, were regulars on the singing contest circuit, with Hans notably becoming a finalist on the reality show *Born to Be a Star.*

Rather than clashing, these diverse backgrounds fused into a natural synergy — a kind of lightning-in-a-bottle chemistry that is now heating up the local scene.

On the other end of the spectrum is 1621, a six-member group consisting of JM, JC, Pan, Win, Migz, and DJ under Star Pop, where they're currently the youngest sibling group to beloved P-pop acts BINI and BGYO. Officially debuting in 2023 with their track "Laruan," the group has steadily carved their space in the mainstream, most notably with their viral hit "Bababa." A standout from their sophomore EP *Sapulso,* "Bababa" is a sweet, bubblegum pop track that's impossible to shake off — a quality that was very much by design.

"There was something special about it from the first listen," shared Star Pop label head Rox Santos. "It had that instant LSS (last song syndrome) effect — you just knew it would stick." Produced by Ron Pangyarihan, the song was crafted with this exact hookiness in mind, engineered to loop in listeners and keep them coming back.

Yet, beyond catchy singles, what truly positions GAT and 1621 as vital voices in the future of P-pop is their sincerity and hands-on involvement in the music-making process.

In the case of 1621, they were eager to be hands-on with their sophomore EP, *Sapulso,* taking on brainstorming sessions that led to creative content strategies and choreography for the songs. "They're very collaborative," Santos added. *"Sila-sila mismo, nag-uusap sila kung anong boses nilang gagawin, anong* part *mo dito, anong* layers *mo dito... Nakakatuwa kasi lahat sila may ambag."*

This kind of teamwork isn't just refreshing — it signals a shift. In today's P-pop landscape, artists are no longer just performers —they've become storytellers, strategists, and visionaries who build their own creative worlds.

On a similar beat, for GAT, Viva wanted to veer away from the stereotyping of P-pop as a Filipino imitation of K-pop; rather, they wanted to do something entirely Pinoy. "We're reinventing classic OPM, basically, by the appreciation of the new generation and reinventing Manila sounds, so to speak." Agor said. While "Daleng Dale" showcases their charm and choreography, the group is also preparing to spotlight their powerhouse vocals, proving they can deliver just as much vocally as they do visually.

Both GAT and 1621 represent the direction P-pop is heading: bold, collaborative, culturally grounded, and unafraid to push creative boundaries. They aren't just echoing what's been done — they're actively shaping what comes next. And in doing so, they remind us that P-pop's future isn't only about going viral. It's about longevity, authenticity, and building a legacy that celebrates Filipino artistry on its own terms.

> **"Both GAT and 1621 aren't just echoing what's been done — they're actively shaping what comes next"**

REPPING THE NEXT GENERATION GAT and 1621 have been making waves in P-pop early into their debut in the scene, stamping their names in the rapidly-growing industry

PHOTOGRAPHED BY VINCE BAGUIO

Breaking The Mold: YARA

How rising P-pop act YARA are straying away from the pop girl group sheen and bringing a refreshing blend of R&B and hip-hop to an ever-evolving genre

BY FRANCHESCA JUDINE BASBAS

P-POP HAS NEVER BEEN JUST ONE THING. Even during its humble beginnings, the genre has always been a blend of Western music, Asian idol groups, and of course, OPM. Today, P-pop continues to be in constant motion — even growing into something much bigger than the many influences it initially took inspiration from.

P-pop — much like the Philippines itself — has always thrived in its diversity. Beyond sound, the genre ranges in language, storytelling, and style. Some groups embrace high-energy dance anthems with sleek production, while others thread the lines between pop, funk, R&B, hip-hop, rock, and even folk. Lyrics shift between Tagalog, English, and regional dialects. Each act brings something different to the table, yet all contribute to pushing the boundaries of what P-pop is and can be.

As the genre continues to grow, so does the space for new voices to redefine it and all that it encompasses. P-pop isn't about fitting into a formula anymore; it's about breaking it.

Enter YARA, an up-and-coming girl group that's adding their unique twist to P-pop.

Since their debut in 2023, the four-piece have always navigated music with a distinct approach. Straying away from polished pop melodies, YARA lean into suave grooves and lyrical attitude, bringing in a refreshing blend of R&B and hip-hop.

From the moment they dropped their debut track, "ADDA" (short for "Apat Dapat, Dapat Apat"), it was clear that the girl group were on a mission to redefine P-pop. The song's fierce energy, slick production, and sharp lyrics set the tone for what was to come — a group that isn't afraid to step outside the box.

YARA comprises Rocher, Angelou, Christa, and Kim, who all met as trainees at their previous entertainment company. Together, the group joined several competitions before famously winning TV5's competition show, *POPinoy,* and earning the title of Grand P-POP Girl Group in 2019.

Roughly four years later, the group eventually debuted with Sony Music Philippines, officially introducing themselves to the world with "ADDA" (short for "'Apat Dapat, Dapat Apat"). Narrating the story of YARA and their aspirations, the song is a fiery blend of trap beats, slick production, and sharp-tongued lyricism that not only introduced them but also signalled an exciting turn for an otherwise bright and pop-driven genre.

Since then, the girls have been gradually building momentum for something bigger. Their releases may have been few and far between, but with each single, they're carving out a space in Filipino music that's fresh, fierce, and unmistakably theirs.

Throughout the years, YARA have released a handful of singles that showcase how expansive P-pop can truly be. In 2023, they dropped a reimagined version of the early-2000s hit "Bakit Papa?" by the SexBomb Girls, flipping the playful pop track with a modern, sultry twist. It was a nod to the past, but with all the confidence of a group looking forward.

But it's in their latest single, "Sabi Ko Na," where YARA's musical identity takes full form. Produced by Yung Bawal and written by JRoa, the song marks a deeper, more introspective side of the group — one that trades loud hooks for smooth beats, vulnerability, and sharp storytelling.

"Sabi Ko Na" is a far cry from the polished sheen of standard idol-pop. It's moody, mature, and a bold shift into what the girls describe as "a new chapter."

"Masasabi namin na ito ang first step *namin sa* sound *talaga ng* YARA, *na mas* hip-hop and R&B," Rocher shares, noting that the track represents a clearer sense of who they are as artists.

*"Eto din 'yung nag-*kickstart *ng* coming-of-age *namin* as YARA," Gelou adds. *"Parang nata*-touch *na rin namin 'yung mga* topics and concepts *na pinag-uusapan dati, na mas* mature. So because of this song, *nagki*-kickstart *lahat.* Excited *na kami."*

When asked about what lies ahead, the girls light up as they gush with genuine excitement for the path they're forging.

"[With "Sabi Ko Na," it's like] there's another path for us now. So *parang in*-indulge *muna namin 'yung sarili namin sa bagong* path *na 'to* and try and rediscover new things," says Gelou, adding that this is just the beginning of YARA and how they're looking forward to releasing a new EP and album, and eventually staging a sold-out show in the future.

Still, stepping into new territory comes with its own kind of weight. While the members are excited for what's next, they're also aware of the challenges that come with entering a space like hip-hop.

"Since *tina*-try namin *pasukin 'yung* genre *na 'to, nag*-worry *lang ako* — especially [because] *wala naman [kami] talagang* roots *sa* hip-hop," Gelou admits. "With the culture, *'yung* community, *medyo napre*-pressure *lang kami — [pero] dapat panindigan namin, 'di ba?* Challenging *talaga siya."*

It's not easy forging your own path, with the girls even admitting that it often feels wrong, but they've never been the type to back down. For YARA, pressure isn't something to avoid but something to rise to.

"'Yung pressure *na 'yun, mahirap pero nakakatulong siya, parang* motivation *po namin siya,"* adds Christa. *"Ang dami pa po namin gustong gawin; umpisa pa lang po 'to."*

As they continue to evolve, YARA remain focused on the bigger picture, making music that resonates with their fans and speaks to their own journey. With a new chapter ahead, they're ready to take on whatever comes next — from expanding their sound and reaching new heights to breaking the mold of what P-pop can be.

In many ways, YARA represent what the future of P-pop could be: unboxed and unpredictable. They're not interested in mirroring what has come before, but instead are looking into paving their own paths. And in doing so, they're proving that P-pop doesn't need to look or sound a certain way to be powerful.

The best is yet to come, and with YARA and many more other groups unafraid to challenge expectations, there's no telling just how far P-pop can go.

READY TO FLY Even before debuting, the girls of YARA have been determined to take over the stage by competing in several competition shows; in 2021, they were declared the first-ever Girl Group Grand Winner at *POPinoy*

> ***"Masasabi namin na ito ang* first step *namin sa* sound *talaga ng* YARA"**
>
> ROCHER

Idol Material: JL Gaspar's Ascent To K-pop Stardom

From his P-pop beginnings to South Korean reality show success, this young Filipino performer is poised to shine on the global stage as a member of a highly anticipated K-pop boy group

BY IAN EMMANUEL C. URRUTIA

PHOTO TAKEN FROM JL GASPAR'S INSTAGRAM (@JL_AHOF)

IN THE PHILIPPINES, the path to stardom rarely begins with the grandest of stages. It starts specifically at home where the *karaoke* machine is a staple and weekend variety shows are considered sacred family traditions. From childhood, Filipinos are surrounded by music: singing duets with parents, being cheered on by titos and titas during impromptu performances, or mimicking dance numbers from noontime show spectacles. Singing and performing are more than just a pastime; it's woven into the fabric of Filipino identity. It's a rite of passage, a shared celebration, a cultural heartbeat that naturally molds future performers long before they step into a formal training room.

Out of this vibrant tradition comes JL Gaspar, a 21-year-old Filipino idol who's fast becoming a breakout name in South Korea's fiercely competitive pop scene. Known to fans as the "Nation's Gentle Center," JL first rose to prominence as a member of P-pop group PLUUS. Trained under SBTown's SB Talent camp, he spent four intense and rigorous years sharpening every facet of his idol artistry, from vocal training to choreography, from media training to image building, and other aspects of performance and presentation. Such discipline would soon pay off, landing him and his group in major Korean events like the 2024 Korea Best Brand Awards and the Waterbomb Festival 2024 in Daejeon.

But even among his rising stars, JL shines differently. His presence is magnetic, his voice commanding yet nuanced, and his confidence wrapped in effortless charisma. Whether he's on stage or simply walking into the room, he exudes that rare kind of stardust. JL doesn't just perform; he serves, slays, and leaves no crumbs.

It's no wonder that he caught the attention of Korean producers and was cast in *Universe League*, a South Korean talent and survival show searching for the next global boy group under F&F Entertainment. JL stood out from the start. His audition performance of "Beautiful," the soaring ballad from the K-drama *Goblin*, earned him a spot as the only Filipino among 42 contestants from around the world. With mentorship from K-pop heavyweights like NCT's Ten, GOT7's Yugyeom, and Jay Park as the host, Universe League was no ordinary training and talent search ground. It was a global stage where only the best could rise.

In the opening episodes of *Universe League*, JL expressed his intention to make it big abroad, specifically in South Korea, the birthplace of K-pop. "From a small stage back home in the Philippines with dreams bigger than ever, I made my way to Korea, the heart of K-pop," JL reveals. "Standing on that glittering stage, imagining it makes my heart race. This is my destiny, and I'm going to shine."

JL's star ascended quickly. In a historic first for the show, every team unanimously selected him as their top pick following his stunning debut performance. With over 3 million public votes and a consistent top-tier rankings through the show, JL emerged as a finalist and ultimately, as one of the main stars of *Universe League*. He is now officially set to debut in the first half of 2025 as a member of AHOF (All Time Hall of Famer), a nine-member boy group poised to take the international stage by storm.

With his victory, JL joins an elite roster of Filipino idols making waves abroad: KATSEYE's Sophia Laforteza, UNIS's Elisia Parmisano, Gehlee Dangca and Jin Hyeon-ju, Lapillus's Chanty, and the trailblazing boy group HORI7ON. But JL's journey is more than a personal triumph; it's a testament to the power and potential of Filipino artistry.

The Philippines has long been a wellspring of world-class talent. We are a nation raised on harmony, rhythm, and storytelling through music. With a culture that fosters creativity from the cradle, Filipinos are naturally equipped to thrive in global pop industries. As JL Gaspar steps into the spotlight, he carries not only the dreams of a nation but a compelling case for why the next generation of international superstars just might come from our *karaoke*-loving, variety show-watching shores. The world should be paying attention — the Philippines isn't just importing pop culture anymore. We're ready to export it. b

> "JL's journey is more than a personal triumph; it's a testament to the power and potential of Filipino artistry"

FULL SUPPORT The members of the P-pop group PLUUS expressed their support for JL Gaspar throughout his *Universe League* journey, and congratulated him on his win on their social media accounts

PHILIPPINES
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VOLUME XI | YEAR 2

P-POP THEN AND NOW

The pioneering MNL48 and the boys of AJAA

P-POP TO THE WORLD

What SB19 and BINI's tours mean to the OPM industry

TAKIN' OVER

G22: ON THEIR WAY TO PINOY POP STARDOM

P250

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Styling by Eldzs Mejia, assisted by Carl Alberto & Miggs Leguera.

P-pop Is Heading To The Next Level — With G22 And ALAMAT Spearheading The Movement

As P-pop continues to flourish locally and globally, a new wave of acts led by G22 and ALAMAT are ushering in a new era of the genre by pushing its boundaries to new heights and traversing sonic frontiers

BY GABRIEL SAULOG

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALEXIS DAVE CO

CREATIVE & FASHION DIRECTION BY DARYL CHANG. G22 STYLING BY ELDZS MEJIA ASSISTED BY CARL ALBERTO & MIGGS LEGUERA. MAKEUP BY JAY SALCEDO (ALFEA & AJ), MARBEN TALANAY (JAZ). HAIR BY JAY WEE (ALFEA, AJ, & JAZ). PRODUCTION DESIGN BY ARJ MADZ. PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTED BY CEDIE BARRMEDA & JOEY HABER. PRODUCED BY MIKA CRUZ.

Styling by Bettina Bañez, assisted by Mel Estillore & Chloe Villanueva.

CREATIVE & FASHION DIRECTION BY DARYL CHANG. STYLING BY BETTINA BAÑEZ ASSISTED BY MEL ESTILLORE & CHLOE VILLANUEVA. GLAM TEAM BY NIX INSTITUTE OF BEAUTY. MAKE-UP BY NIX SORIANO (JAO & TANEO) ASSISTED BY JAMILA SAN & PATRICIA MARCAIDA. MAKE-UP BY LEILANI BAMBA-RIZON (MO). MAKE-UP BY MARIBELL RAMAT (R-JI) ASSISTED BY LUCILLE PLAZA. MAKE-UP BY CRISH MARFIL (ALAS) ASSISTED BY LUCILLE PLAZA. MAKE-UP BY RED PAJARILLO-SANTIAGO (TOMAS). HAIR BY WANWAN PODADERA AMARILLO & JESSEY MARIE (JAO, TANEO, & MO). HAIR BY HAIR BY JESSEY MARIE (R-JI, ALAS, & TOMAS). PRODUCTION DESIGN BY ARJ MADZ. PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTED BY CEDIE BARRMEDA & JOEY HABER. PRODUCED BY MIKA CRUZ.

Whether you like it or not, P-pop is nearly everywhere you could look.

From the billboards in EDSA that you drive by and the unskippable advertisements you see on your phone screens, to the upbeat tracks that come up in your streaming algorithms, the overarching presence of what was once a niche genre has risen to become the loud and proud heartbeat of the Filipino music scene today.

P-pop's evolution from the kitschy days of the SexBomb Girls or the Chicser phenomenon has blossomed into a mainstream movement that is ubiquitous and as highly organized as it is methodical.

These days, heavy-hitting acts such as SB19 and BINI have become recognized across both the local and international scenes — not merely for their chart-breaking accomplishments or their expansive (and distinctly Filipino) discographies, but also for their impeccable branding that has won over millions of fans all across the globe.

With the immense and stratospheric success of their efforts, the doors have been opened for a new wave of acts like VIVA Records' multicultural six-member group ALAMAT and Cornerstone Entertainment's dynamic trio of femmes fatales, G22 — who, despite continuing in the same footsteps of their predecessors, have also reshaped the boundaries of P-pop into their own intentions and unique ways.

Since their respective debuts back in 2021 and 2022, both groups have been making waves within the Filipino music scene, gaining prominence over the past few years with an abundance of hit singles. ALAMAT's "Maharani" has found itself on the *Billboard Philippines* charts numerous times, while G22's "BANG" has solidified itself as a razor-sharp hit that has become beloved by the general public. The trajectory of their careers has only grown their presence, and has built them up to become the next big thing within the sprawling P-pop scene.

Yet today, the two groups have found themselves at the *Billboard Philippines* studio as early as five in the morning, getting ready for a full-day shoot that includes multiple layouts and outfit changes as the cover stars for this June issue. Despite the early hours required of them, both groups have nothing but gratitude for being the faces of the burgeoning P-pop movement.

"Being here right now, it's an absolute honor. We're grateful for the opportunity to represent P-pop and Filipino talent, and this cover is a big honor for us because now there's a platform for us to share what we've always wanted to do in our careers," says ALAMAT's Jao. Such sentiments are echoed by G22's AJ, who makes a strong point by stating, "We've seen our seniors be part of this platform as well, and to be part of the lineup alongside them, following in their footsteps, is such a big privilege and also a responsibility that we have to live up to on our end."

Of course, getting to this point comes as a result of several years of hard work, dedication, and time spent evolving into the artists that they are today. G22's Jaz notes just how much they've witnessed from both themselves and the scene within that timeframe, saying, "It has been so incredible to see the growth from our peers and the people around us."

"From the first time we met each other, our first performances, and how our stages and platforms grew in several ways alongside P-pop, it only goes to show that the music industry of the Philippines is growing so much, and it's amazing being a part of that," she continues.

Within that time, ALAMAT has become renowned for their integration of cross-cultural elements in every aspect of their artistry, while G22 have been crowned the prestigious title as the "Female Alphas of P-pop" for their distinct and empowering set of soundscapes. Even when considering the commercial and business sense, they've become adorned with several brand partnerships, taking on responsibilities as the faces and ambassadors to some of the biggest names in the local industry.

However, getting to this point in their respective careers comes as a

> **"When you think of Filipino music, you really think about how much of themselves they put into the music. Perseverance, hard work, and heart, it's like *lumalaban talaga 'yung* Filipino music because there's so much potential in it and we really fight for it."**
>
> G22'S AJ

On G22: CARL ARCUSA dresses and ensemble, H&M belt.

result of several formative experiences and challenges that have shaped their career mindset — both for better and for worse. Though each of them has welcomed change and growth in their lives, it obviously manifests in ways that no one could control.

"The mixture of what ALAMAT is today just wouldn't be possible without the struggles, failures, and the accomplishments we've faced as a group," mentions Taneo, reflecting on all they've experienced since their debut.

As the members of ALAMAT expound upon their struggles, they note how the issue of colorism and discrimination over their accents is something they've often faced over the years. Despite being confident in their own skin, they mention how the barrage of negative comments is often difficult to ignore, leading some members to become shy about showing what they're capable of.

"*Parang naiilang kami kasi may mga masamang* comments *'yung mga tao. Kaya minsan, nahihiya kami ipakita 'yung* talent *namin. Pero ngayon, gusto namin ipakita kung anong meron kami, kahit anong sinasabi ng mga iba diyan. At buti na lang may mga* changes *na nangyayari,"* says Alas.

Jao also somberly points out the factor of their changing lineup, as they initially started as a nine-member group but have lost three members in the four years since their debut. "It turns out each and every one has different paths, and *kami 'yung nagsama-sama*. But we're still proud of each other," he states.

The matter of changing lineups and the loss of a member is an experience that G22 is also all too familiar with, given the departure of their fourth member back in 2023. Yet despite the initial setback, it was a challenge that the remaining members welcomed with open arms — even if it meant taking on more responsibilities, and having to adjust in a myriad of ways.

"We really fought for our journey to be here," notes Jaz. "And I think

On G22: AJ JAVIER Suit jacket and suit dresses.

THE NEXT BIG THING
Despite the prevalence of several P-pop acts that have debuted over the past year alone, all ears are still tuned to G22 and ALAMAT, and what lies ahead of their careers

that's something we've tried on all of our songs, specifically our most recent track, 'Pa-Pa-Pa-Palaban.' All of our personal and group experiences led up to that moment. We've had a lot of dark, confusing times, and, individually, there were so many sacrifices that we made to stay together."

But in the face of uncertainty, nothing ever felt truly limited for G22. Their struggles were immediately countered by a collective mindset that embraced the chance to evolve, and to learn from their mistakes, experiences, and the people around them.

"I think it just came naturally that we were growing as well. We started our careers late in our teens, approaching our adulthood, so we took whatever we could and translated it artistically and musically. From there, it just naturally evolved into spreading empowerment and confidence for those around us," AJ says.

Alfea points out how they've taken inspiration from their surrounding environments, noting, "We learn so much from our peers, our mentors, and from the people surrounding us. And that helps us in delivering the message we want for our music. But [we asked ourselves], how do we make it powerful and spread out? And I think that's where G22 comes in," she states.

Amidst all the experiences that ALAMAT and G22 have faced, it's an undeniable fact that both groups have emerged wiser, more dedicated, and ultimately more successful with everything they've managed to accomplish over this period of time. And though their undisputed success comes with quite a high, there still lies an underlying pressure that they often feel from time to time — which the two P-pop acts agree is beneficial to their craft.

"I feel like it's more of a good pressure to push us to be better," says Jao. "*Dumadami [kasi] 'yung mga* P-pop groups, which is good. And *lahat ng mga* P-pop groups, super talented. Though it's not a competition, we're motivated to be better *at galingan pa namin lalo,* especially since *nauna kami,* so we need to show them what we're capable of."

Alfea makes a similar point, expressing the motivational effect it places on her and her fellow members: "Feeling it just means that what we're doing is very important for us. Because if we don't feel the pressure, it just means that we don't love what we do."

On Jao: Sheer button down, vest and trousers by Miguel Rosario. On R-Ji: Barong coat by Amor Albano courtesy of DOST-PTRI. On Taneo: Barong bomber jacket by Jan Paul Martinez. On Alas: Embroidered silk linen barong by Kelvin Morales, Boots from London Rag. On Tomas: Barong by Antonina, Barong vest by Jan Paul Martinez. On Mo: Boxy barong shirt by Patrick Lazol, Sheer overskirt by Antonina.

"The presence of pressure just signifies how great our peers are, and we look to them with sheer awe," adds Jaz. "There's no body or formula that we feel pressured to replicate, but the standard of how excellent they are, how they show up and do their best all the time — that's what we want to replicate and to pursue ourselves. It's like we're fighting against our [past] selves, so that we can figure out how we're going to level up from where we are."

AJ then concludes that it's the very element that gives G22 their formidable edge that they've become renowned for. "It is good pressure, because it pushes us not to be stagnant. It pushes us to be greater and to strive for excellence in whatever we do. Because diamonds are made under pressure," she states with unabashed confidence.

With everything that ALAMAT, G22, and the rest of the P-pop scene have accomplished, both groups have only high hopes for what lies ahead for the genre. Aside from the spaces they've been able to carve out for themselves, they have made a significant impression on what P-pop can be, finding new means of breaking its boundaries, and innovating the signature elements that have made the genre a cultural staple of the 2020s.

> **"Though it's not a competition, we're motivated to be better *at galingan pa namin lalo,* especially since *nauna kami,* so we need to show them what we're capable of."**
>
> ALAMAT'S JAO

Although no one can be sure with regard to the future of the genre, ALAMAT's Jao hopes that it could very well be recognized on the same level of global phenomena such as K-pop, hyper-pop, and the like. "Within the next few years, I'm confident that P-pop will be given a platform that could introduce an artist to the Philippines and the whole world, just like what K-pop has done for Korea. Because it's something that we deserve, especially since *napaka*-talented ng mga Pinoy."

"When you think of Filipino music, you really think about how much of themselves they put into the music. Perseverance, hard work, and heart, it's like *lumalaban talaga 'yung* Filipino music because there's so much potential in it, because we really fight for it," mentions AJ. Alfea concurs, "Everyone notes na Filipinos are so resilient, and that's something I could connect to the P-pop scene because all these idols have a lot of potential, which is why I see the genre continuing to rise in the Philippines and the world."

While Filipino music continues to expand its global footprint, there's no denying that P-pop stands at the forefront of this movement. Given the massive success and resounding impact that several P-pop artists have made, it has only paved the way for the next generation of local talent to have the spotlight shined on them — which is exactly where ALAMAT and G22 are standing proudly. As more eyes take note of the genre's rapid ascent, it is these two acts that stand as the next big names that can take Filipino music to the next level alongside their peers who have shared the space and paved the way for them.

With new EPs from both groups scheduled to drop later in the year, there lies so much promise and potential with what lies in store for their careers. Because as ALAMAT and G22 embark on new horizons, it's up to us to pay attention and behold what they're capable of — as it is them who will trace the trajectory of what the future of what P-pop will soon evolve into.

For as P-pop continues to rise, it is through its journey that we bear witness to how ALAMAT and G22 usher in the next generation of Filipino talent that can follow in their footsteps. b

chartbreaker

A Fight Song For The People: SB19's "DAM"

Serving as a loud roar of victory over adversity, the Kings of P-pop have unleashed a heavy-hitting battle anthem that has deeply resonated with listeners in the Philippines and beyond

BY MAYKS GO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY EASEL MANES

WHEREVER YOU ARE IN LIFE, there will always be victories and losses, progress and setbacks. And whether you're chasing your goals or desiring for a better tomorrow for everyone around you, you need to let your voice be heard in order for things to change. SB19 know this very well and perfectly encapsulate the feeling in their explosive comeback single "DAM."

Released on February 28, 2025, it served as the prelude to the P-pop icons' latest EP, *Simula At Wakas.* Beyond proclaiming the group's hopes of pushing creative boundaries, the song ultimately serves as a reflection of what they have endured in the past seven years or so. "It's about our journey," states SB19's leader Pablo to *Billboard Philippines*, noting how "DAM" captures both the wins they've achieved and the struggles it took to do so.

With a strongly relatable message such as this, the single soon found itself resonating with countless people. With the track expressing both frustration and resilience in the face of life's trials, sure enough "DAM" soon made a profound mark on many.

Stell notes that one of the reasons he's seen why people deeply relate with it so much is because it reflects that state of our nation, noting how "DAM" has become a "fight song" for these people, especially against injustice. *"Kung alam mong may maling nangyayari, kailangan mo ipaglaban at gamitin ang boses mo para marinig ka at itama 'yung mali... 'Yung boses mo, 'yun ang sandata mo."*

In bringing this impassioned track to life, the members of SB19 admit that their abilities as artists and as performers were tested and often pushed to the limits. *"Kinailangan talaga na sanayin namin sarili namin,* like, *kailangan na* conditioned *'yung boses,"* Justin reveals, specifically noting how vocally demanding the song's chorus can be for him, even until now. Ultimately, recording "DAM" served as a fulfilling creative experience for them, aligning with one of their major goals for this new era: to outdo themselves like never before.

Aided by this strong show of artistic resolve and the support of SB19's loyal fanbase — the A'TIN — "DAM" quickly soon found massive, record-breaking success. In a week alone, it achieved rapidly growing streams and sales from all over the world, with Justin proudly highlighting the fact that its music video gained over four million views in the first 24 hours alone.

With this came two of their biggest milestones so far: attaining the No. 1 spot on *Billboard's* World Digital Song Sales chart for the first time, and "DAM" becoming their first song to enter the *Billboard Philippines* charts as well. "Until now, *hindi kami makapaniwala na umabot sa ganun 'yung* 'DAM,'" states Stell, expressing his awe and heartfelt gratitude for their rapidly growing following.

With "DAM" achieving milestones in both streams and consumption, Ken expresses hopes that their listeners can learn a lot of valuable lessons from the track, encouraging them to always move forward with eyes on their goals: *"'Wag sila sumuko. Mag-*focus *lang sila sa mga gusto nilang ma-*achieve."

Josh echoes these sentiments clearly, stating that, if "DAM" were to leave any sort of impact behind on its listeners, he hopes that it can be a much-needed reminder for them to keep fighting despite life's trials. "It still amazes me *na marami talaga kaming na-i-*inspire and I hope *patuloy lang namin magawa 'yun."*

Ultimately, in further expressing the group's gratitude, Pablo proudly recognizes how their fans have always been there through thick and thin, describing them as the reason why SB19 have always managed to bounce back, even from the worst of challenges. *"Kahit gasgas na,* 'thank you.' *Walang* SB19 *kung walang* A'TIN." **b**

No.4
ON BILLBOARD PHILIPPINES HOT 100

No.3
ON BILLBOARD PHILIPPINES TOP PHILIPPINES SONGS

No.1
ON BILLBOARD WORLD DIGITAL SONG SALES

Where the Music Plays

BY RALPH REGIS

Playing and performing music doesn't need to be confined to a particular setting. Musicians can play right on the sidewalks and busk, perform an intimate set at a café, or even serenade an audience in a virtual show. But nothing beats the experience of an artist truly showcasing their craft and capabilities in the perfect music venue. From go-to gig spots like the 12 Monkeys Music Hall and Pub to the newly reborn Metropolitan Theater, here are some of the best venues you can rent for your next live music performance.

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1. 12 MONKEYS MUSIC HALL AND PUB

12 Monkeys Music Hall & Pub is a vibrant live entertainment venue currently located at the ground floor of Estancia Mall, Capitol Commons in Pasig City. Since opening in 2014 at its original Makati location, it has hosted countless shows across an eclectic range of music genres, featuring artists such as Sandwich, Nina, Side A, December Avenue, Ebe Dancel, and more. Beyond that, 12 Monkeys also serves authentic Filipino cuisine alongside a selection of cocktails and specialty beers, making it a popular destination for music enthusiasts, gig-goers, and food lovers alike.

2. 123 BLOCK

Another staple venue in the local gig scene is 123 Block, a dynamic outdoor space located at Mandala Park in Shaw Boulevard, Mandaluyong City. Owned by Ciudad and ex-Sugarfree drummer Mitch Singson, it has become one of the most popular venues for live music, as it maximizes its spacious, open-air area that accommodates standing audiences in a breathable and flexible environment. Notable artists who have performed at the venue include Barbie Almalbis, Chicosci, Kamikazee, SOS, One Click Straight, The Ridleys, Dilaw, Urbandub, and Typecast.

3. THE AXON AT GREEN SUN

Located at the Green Sun Hotel in Makati, The Axon is a versatile convention center with a floor space that can accommodate up to 1,000 guests or more. With its flexible layout, this venue is ideal for music gigs, launches, and community gatherings. It has hosted events like Satchmi Vinyl Day and the Indie Stage of Fête de la Musique 2016, making it a great space for culture and community. For a time in the 2010s, it was a favorite venue for indie artists like Reese Lansangan, Clara Benin, and many others to launch their albums and celebrate milestones.

4. THE METROPOLITAN THEATER

The Metropolitan Theater, also known as The MET, is a historic art deco venue located at Plaza Lawton in Manila. Originally designed by Filipino architect Juan M. Arellano and inaugurated in 1931, it is one of the Philippines' most important cultural landmarks. After finally reopening in December 2021 for its 90th anniversary, the "Grand Dame" of Manila now stands in its full glory. The theater offers spaces for various events, including concerts, theater productions, operas, and cultural performances, under the administration of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA).

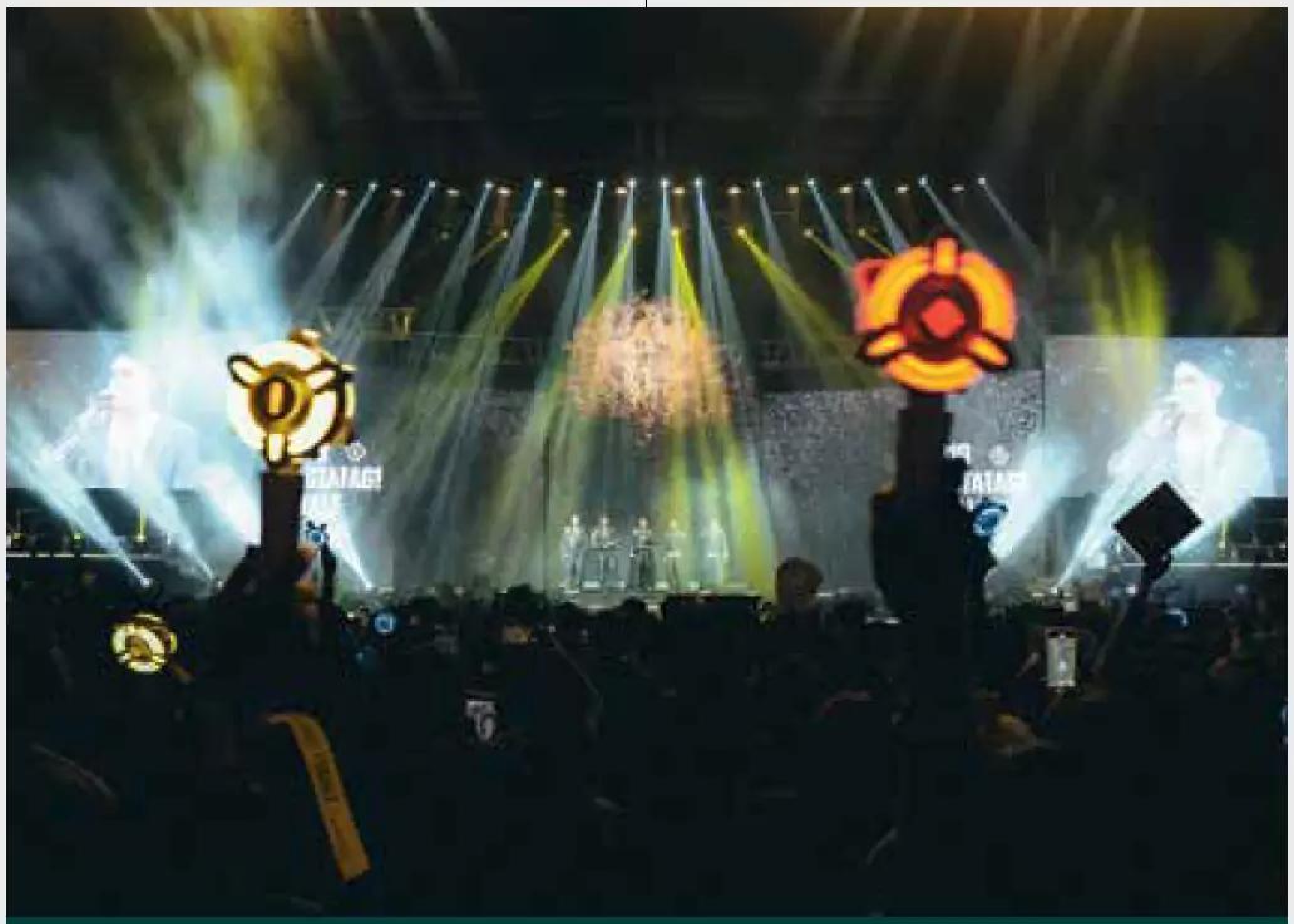
5. NEW FRONTIER THEATER

The New Frontier Theater in Araneta City is a premier venue for concerts and live music events, blending its rich history with modern sensibilities. With a seating capacity of over 2,300, it offers an intimate atmosphere within a grand setting, perfect for both local and international artists. The theater also accommodates exclusive fan events, music launches, and performances. Located in the heart of Cubao in Quezon City, it is surrounded by hotels, restaurants, and accessible transportation, offering convenience for both artists and audiences.

6. SAMSUNG PERFORMING ARTS THEATER

The Samsung Performing Arts Theater is a state-of-the-art cultural venue located in Circuit, Makati City. With a seating capacity of 1,520, the theater hosts various events such as concerts, musicals, conferences, and workshops. It features versatile spaces, including the main auditorium, which is perfect for large-scale performances, and the Dalkia Rehearsal Hall, which can host dance classes and workshops. Additionally, the Santiago Cua Patrons Lounge offers a relaxing space for guests to enjoy, with conference rooms for private meetings and production conferences. b

PHOTOS BY MAYKS GO, RONNIE LUZENTALES, AND KAREN DE LA FUENTE. MET PHOTO TAKEN FROM METROPOLITAN THEATER'S FACEBOOK PAGE.



SB19 The undisputed Kings of P-pop are set to stage their biggest shows to date with their *'Simula At Wakas'* World Tour, which has already sold out majority of its show dates across North America, the Middle East, and beyond

following suit with their own global tour scheduled across the US, UK, and Middle East over the next few months this 2025.

Yet prior to their expansion within the global setting, both P-pop groups planned their tour kick-off shows at Bulacan's Philippine Arena — recognized as the world's largest indoor arena. Moreover, with a seating capacity of over 55,000, the structure has become a marquee venue symbolizing the genre's rise. Filling this venue is not just an achievement in fan support, but also a benchmark for profitability and influence — marking yet another milestone for BINI as they clinched the title as the first OPM act to sell out the entire space.

SB19 weren't necessarily too far behind in achieving such a feat, as they managed to sell out all available tickets within the first seven hours of its availability online. "We never expected that," says Puno, as she expressed their team's surprise at how fast tickets sold out. *"Sabi ko, mapupuno ba natin 'tong* Philippine Arena? I was confident that with Araneta, we can. But with the Philippine Arena, *talagang suntok sa buwan 'yan.* We just gambled on it, which is why we were surprised to see more than 130,000 people sa queue," she continued.

What happened next once again made history for both SB19 and the P-pop genre, as the immense demand for this co-production between Starmedia Entertainment and Live Nation Philippines eventually resulted in a second date for the concert, which is already close to selling out at the time of this writing.

Given that BINI and SB19's Philippine Arena shows served as the starting point for their world tours, it also positioned itself as a strategic entry into gaining more visibility for overseas markets. Both groups' expansion into North America, Europe, and the Middle East is more than a musical conquest — it's a calculated business strategy. These regions have significant Filipino diasporas, providing a built-in audience foundation. Additionally, P-pop is tapping into the broader Hallyu wave, leveraging global interest in Asian pop culture.

BINI have been fortunate in garnering traction across various online spaces that tap into such interests, which has earned them a significant amount of fans in the Japanese and Western markets. Certain attendees from the group's Philippine Arena concert flew in specifically from Japan just to catch the show, while the shows for their earlier BINIVerse Tour in Canada sold out as well.

Touring internationally allows P-pop labels and management companies to test and scale their acts in new markets. According to event management insiders, booking venues in cities like London, New York, and Dubai costs significantly more than local gigs, but the ROI can be substantial if ticketing strategies, marketing campaigns, and fan engagement are executed effectively.

"From what I've noticed about [SB19's] shows abroad, it's that they don't only cater to the Filipino market. They cater to the Americans, Hispanics, and more, which is what also surprises me," Puno adds. "Because during the second tour that we did with the group (*'PAGTATAG!'* World Tour), there was always a line before the show and you could see that their fans were as young as 10 years old and even as old as 75 to 80 years old. Surprisingly, you would see *'yung mga naka*-wheelchair *at naka*-cane!"

Even with the group's forthcoming *'Simula At Wakas'* World Tour, their influence continues to broaden with global audiences, which has already led to several sold-out dates for the majority of their stops across various countries. "With almost all the shows that we have in the US and Canada, we were able to sell out in less than five minutes," Puno notes. "In a way, [what SB19 has accomplished] is actually making history for a new wave of OPM acts," she then concludes.

Looking ahead, the trajectory of P-pop is poised to ascend even further. Labels and artist management companies are now investing in talent training programs, international collaborations, and AI-driven marketing analytics to better understand audience preferences and maximize engagement.

As SB19 and BINI's tours continue to break new ground, they serve as case studies in how a regional music genre can scale globally with the right blend of talent, timing, and market savvy. For investors and industry insiders, P-pop is no longer a trend to watch — it's a dynamic market sector ripe for participation.

In sum, the business of P-pop concerts — from the Philippine Arena to global stages — represents a confluence of cultural pride, economic opportunity, and global connectivity. And as these artists continue to raise the bar, the world will increasingly tune in — not just to listen, but as a means of investment. ◼

"Both SB19 and BINI's expansion into North America, Europe, and the Middle East is more than a musical conquest — it's a calculated business strategy"

SB19 PHOTOGRAPHED BY MAYKS GO. BINI PHOTOGRAPHED BY GABRIEL SAULOG.

market

Bigger Than The Sound: What SB19 and BINI's 2025 World Tours Mean For The Growing P-Pop Movement

The sheer scale of both SB19 and BINI's global tours represents a pivotal moment in the Philippine music scene, highlighting the growing influence of P-pop across local and international markets

BY GABRIEL SAULOG

OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS ALONE, it's become an undeniable fact that the impact of the P-pop genre has grown rapidly — not merely within the music industry, but also within the realm of business and consumer culture.

As it is, we're seeing several of their acts become the faces and ambassadors of some of the biggest brands, and we've witnessed the production of some of the grandest concerts in the genre's history to date — making it evident that the demand for P-pop has become larger than ever before.

From the sold-out shows of both SB19 and BINI at the Philippine Arena to what we're seeing of their escalating global fan base, P-pop has emerged as a high-value market sector in the entertainment industry. No longer a niche genre, it has now evolved into a phenomenon that commands multi-million peso productions and international tours that rival those of K-pop and Western pop acts.

For industry stakeholders, this signifies not only a shift in musical preferences, but also an opening of lucrative business opportunities across event management, merchandising, sponsorships, and global market penetration.

In its early days, P-pop struggled for visibility amid the dominance of Western and Korean pop music in the Philippines. But today, acts like SB19 and BINI have spearheaded a renaissance, transforming what was once an underdog genre into a cultural and economic force.

Starmedia Entertainment, which has championed Filipino artists on the global stage over the past few decades, took the chance to invest in SB19 since their early days. "With SB19, we were the ones who supported them [on their first shows abroad] two years ago, and they were just starting out. *Hindi pa sila masyado malakas sa mga tao noon.* But it was up to us to take that risk, so we said, let's see if we can sell them," says Anna Puno, the company's CEO and President.

"When we started their first world tour, of course, *kumbaga* trial period lang. Not all the venues were filled up. *Kasi* we were just starting, and we used that as a means of studying the market. However, it was always part of our vision that we give chances to new acts [like they were at the time]. And true enough, right now, SB19 is one of our biggest acts." she continued.

Just two years ago, their staging of SB19's *'PAGTATAG!'* World Tour sold out several major venues, not just locally, but also in key international cities including Los Angeles, Toronto, and Dubai. Their prolific success in achieving such feats soon paved the way for other acts to try their hand in doing the same — which is why BINI is quickly

BINI Following the success of their sold-out show at the Philippine Arena, BINI are now poised to dominate several popular venues such as the Ovo Arena in Wembley and The Theatre at Madison Square Garden in New York City, among others

This got me intrigued into learning how to produce my own music.”

“In the Philippines, it is quite difficult to start out and purchase the proper equipment and learn proper techniques in music production,” he explains. “This is because these things aren’t as easily available as in other countries and the prices here are nearly double at times.” Luckily for him, Chan was able to get his start in production thanks to his grandmother, who encouraged him and even purchased his first pieces of recording equipment during a trip to the US.

To say that Chan is an in-demand producer is an understatement, as his track record speaks for itself. In most cases, he knows exactly how to approach a song to make it better, but turning one into a certified hit isn’t necessarily a goal. “A song with a great melody, lyrics, and a great hook will always excite me to work on it,” he explains. “Having a good melody and hook helps me think of a distinct intro that helps the song stick and stand out to the listeners. Having good lyrics gives me great ideas in telling the song’s story through the elements I place in the song,” he adds, citing Over October’s “Ikot” and Cup of Joe’s “Multo” as two examples of songs he has worked on that follow this pattern. Moreover, for the former, he took the members of Over October on a hike up Mt. Ulap to help put them in the proper headspace to work on the track afterwards.

On the other hand, it may come as a surprise that a hit-making group like Dilaw didn’t tickle Chan’s fancy at first. “When I first worked with Dilaw, I never thought they would end up becoming that great of a band. They were just like any other client who came in and wanted a song recorded,” the producer admits. “My whole perspective of them changed after seeing them play live, though; they were incredibly talented. When we worked on ‘Uhaw,’ it never really crossed my mind that it would be a hit. We just had fun with the song, made it more palatable, and tried to make it a bit different from the usual ‘Dilaw rock band’ vibes.”

It’s worth noting that songs like “Uhaw,” “Tingin,” “Pasilyo,” and others that bear his sonic stamp and have garnered millions of streams were recorded by artists hailing from cities outside of Metro Manila, like Baguio and Olongapo. While this digital era has made it easier for artists from all over the country to be heard, Chan’s contribution to making the aforementioned tracks (and many others he has worked on) stand out and capture a mass audience is undeniable.

Still, the humble producer doesn’t take credit for playing a huge part in shifting the focus on music from outside the metro; instead, he chalks up the success of those songs to the artists’ sheer talent, and the diversity of their origins. “[The industry] should definitely invest more on acts outside Metro Manila,” Chan concludes. “Every artist around the Philippines has [their own] unique cultural background that adds to the beauty that is OPM.” ■

ALWAYS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR FRESH TALENT Despite having produced seasoned bands like Dilaw, Cup Of Joe, and more, Shadiel Chan has also worked with up-and-coming acts like Mariah Deborah and Solace Out The Door — artists whose music he wholeheartedly recommends

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SHAIRA LUNA

The Magic Touch of Shadiel Chan

The young Baguio-based producer behind chart-topping hits by Cup Of Joe, Dilaw, Over October, and many more talks about how he makes a good song great

BY JASON CABALLA

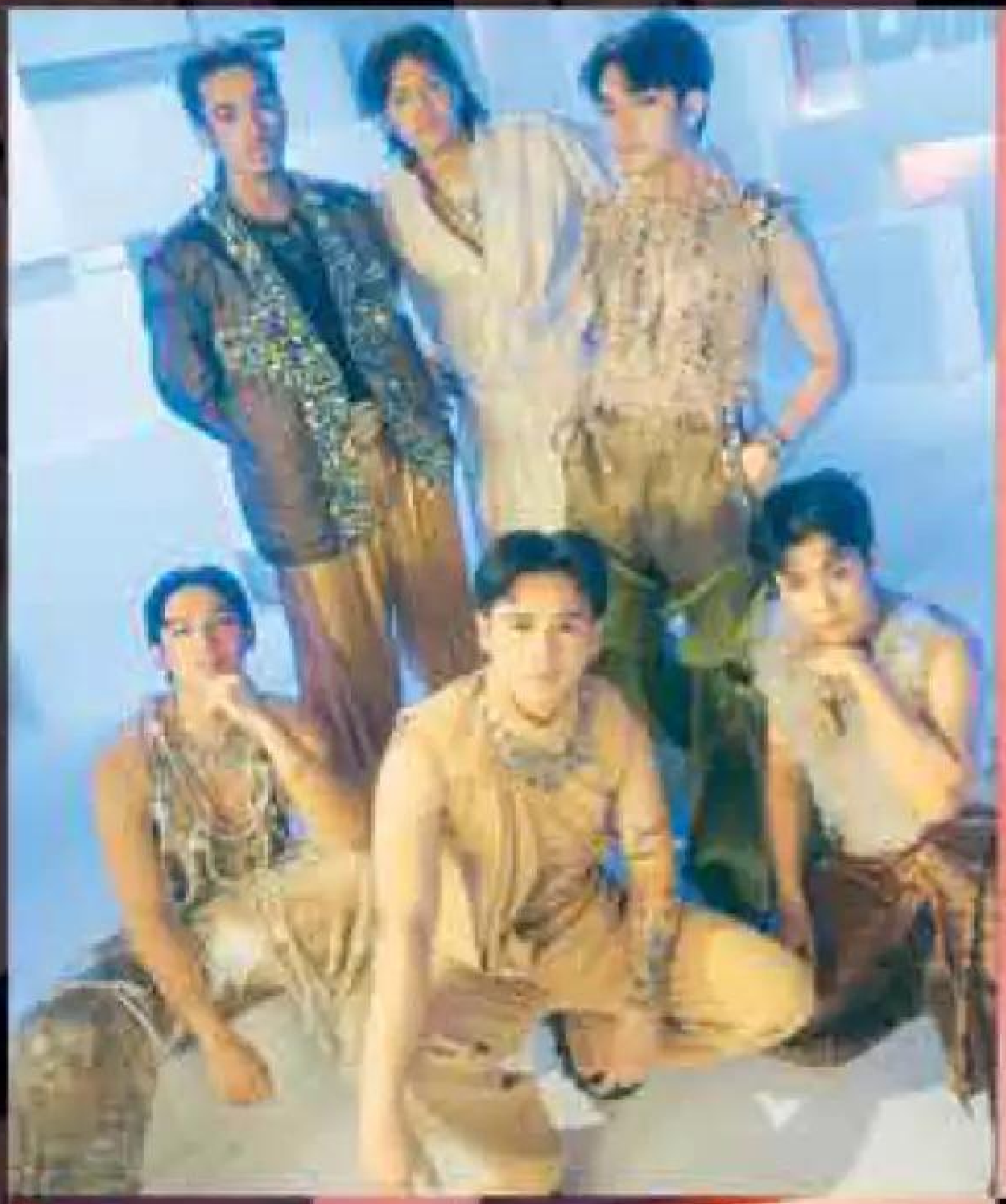
IT'S INTERESTING TO NOTE that the hottest young producer on the scene hails from the coldest city in the Philippines.

"No matter where you are in the world, there would always be something in that environment that could inspire you to create music," says record producer, audio engineer, and label head Shadiel Chan, who was born and raised in Baguio City. "As for Baguio, I am probably inspired by being able to take my time and soak in the environment with the slower-paced lifestyle."

At only 31 years old, Chan has made quite a name for himself as a go-to producer, having applied his magic touch on many big hits and chart-toppers of the last few years. There's "Pasilyo" by SunKissed Lola, "Uhaw" by Dilaw, "Lihim" by Arthur Miguel, "Tingin" by Cup of Joe and Janine Teñoso, and "Ikot" by Over October, just to name a few. In addition, he runs the independent label Nine Degrees North, which also produces the popular YouTube performance video series Live At The Cozy Cove.

Chan narrates that his interest in music started when he wanted to learn how to play a variety of instruments at the church he served at. He eventually moved on to writing his own songs and wanting to record them. "My family was very supportive and helped me book a recording studio and it cost quite a lot for just a few hours of recording time," he continues. "The end result was a song that I was not really so happy about.

> "A song with a great melody, lyrics, and a great hook will always excite me to work on it"



“The question is no longer whether or not P-pop will last; it’s how far it can go”

P-pop: What's Next

When we say that P-pop is rising, it's a cultural signal that our local music is headed towards greater heights — trajectories we hadn't anticipated before

BY ROME SAENZ

IN 2025, P-pop is no longer just a rising trend — it's a movement gaining momentum. While rooted in decades of pop experimentation and fan-driven culture, today's P-pop is charting a new course — toward global stages, deeper cultural storytelling, and an industry that is finally investing in its own stars. It has come to the point that the question is no longer whether or not P-pop will last; it's how far it can go.

Though the term "P-pop" has recently gained traction, the meaning of Philippine pop has transformed from its literal definition to the phenomenon we see with idol groups today.

When we look back at what begot the P-pop renaissance we witness today, the years of 2016 to 2018 play a massive role in the current success the genre currently experiences. In 2016, MNL48 introduced the Japanese idol system to Filipino audiences, and SB19 — trained under a Korean company but writing songs in Filipino — brought a polished, disciplined sound with the emotional depth of OPM storytelling. Their success marked a paradigm shift: that P-pop could hold its own in a globalized music industry, not by copying K-pop or J-pop, but by innovating within those frameworks through a uniquely Filipino lens.

What followed was a tidal wave. BGYO and BINI, both under ABS-CBN's Star Pop, launched with clear concepts, original music, and a long-term vision. They didn't just deliver music — they offered narratives, aesthetics, and philosophies that spoke to Gen Z while honoring Filipino values and experiences. Groups like G22, VXON, AJAA, and ALAMAT have followed suit, creating an ecosystem of artists who are sonically diverse, culturally grounded, and internationally aspirational.

P-pop is no longer just reflecting trends from abroad — it's now building its own blueprint for success. While the genre takes cues from K-pop's intensive training, fan engagement strategies, and multi-platform storytelling, P-pop groups are leaning into their national identity as a core strength; making cultural relatability a key bond to their fandoms.

From the multilingual lyrics of ALAMAT to the nostalgic revamps of classic OPM songs like "Bongga Ka Day" and "Daleng Dale" by RAYA and GAT respectively, the genre is evolving into a cultural vessel — one that exports Filipino heritage alongside entertainment.

This identity-forward approach is key to its global rise. SB19's inclusion in *Billboard* Global charts, sold-out international tours, and more showed that there is space — and demand — for Filipino narratives on the world stage. BINI's success with their extensive list of Philippine chart-toppers and growing international recognition across and beyond Asia further affirms that the future of P-pop isn't bound to the local market — it's built for global resonance while still inherently *Pinoy*.

This new wave of P-pop is also reshaping the local music industry's infrastructure. Artist development, once an afterthought, is now a serious investment. Entertainment companies are starting to pour resources into training, production, and branding — ushering in a more professionalized, sustainable system for pop stars to thrive. Big concerts and music festivals, previously dominated by imported acts or legacy OPM artists, are now showcasing P-pop acts as headliners to be crowd-pullers in their own right. Festivals, mall tours, and headlining concerts are being driven by fandoms that are fiercely organized, digitally native, and growingly critical stakeholders.

More importantly, P-pop is inspiring a new generation of artists — not just singers and dancers, but producers, stylists, and creatives who see the genre as a collaborative canvas for innovation. It's encouraging young talents to see music not as a fallback career, but a viable, forward-facing industry with cultural and economic value.

The future of P-pop hinges on one thing: momentum. The foundation has been laid. The talent is abundant. The audience is hungry. But for the genre to grow beyond being a regional niche, the industry must continue to think bigger — more original albums, border-crossing collaborations, and platforms that champion Filipino voices on the global stage.

We can expect to see P-pop groups break into new markets, not just as performers, but as cultural ambassadors. With the rise of Filipino diasporic communities around the world and increasing interest in Southeast Asian pop culture, the door is wide open for P-pop to build bridges — between generations, between nations, and between tradition and innovation. b

ANG HIMIG NATIN While P-pop as we know it took shape in the 2010s with the influence of Korean and Japanese pop, Pinoy pop in general has existed since the 1960s and has evolved from sentimental ballads to the "Manila Sound" in the '70s, and so on

PHOTO OF AJAA BY ENZO SANTOS. PHOTOS OF ALAMAT, BGYO, G22, AND VXON BY EASEL MANES.

FIFTH GENERATION According to the group's website, MNL48 have officially opened auditions to young women aged 18 and above, who are "passionate about singing, dancing, or performing," and are "team-oriented and eager to learn"

known as MNLoves — vote for their favorite members to be "chosen" as official members.

Members ranked 33 to 48 are called the Next Girls, while 17 to 32 are the Under Girls, and the Top 16 are the Senbatsu. The Top 7, also known as the Kami 7, are the elite members who perform globally with AKB48 and would also go on to receive special training and endorsements. Lastly, the Center Girl is the top-ranked member and the face of MNL48. April 28, 2018 marked MNL48's official debut on It's Showtime, announcing the Top 48 ranked members with Shekinah Arzaga as the group's first-ever Center Girl.

It's a common misconception that MNL48 were formed to imitate K-pop or Korean idol groups, particularly when K-pop was rapidly gaining popularity in the Philippines. This comparison was made because the Philippine media wasn't accustomed to showcasing Japanese-style idols or the idol system in general. One aspect that is new to the Philippine audience is a "Handshake" event, a type of meet-and-greet where fans have the chance to meet their favorite members in person. The group had their first "Meet Your Oshimen" event on April 22 at TriNoma Mall in Quezon City.

MNL48 released the music video for their single, "Aitakatta – Gustong Makita," under ABS-CBN's Star Music label in August 2018. A month later, on September 14, 2018, they released their debut EP *Aitakatta* on September 28. In November, they released their second single, "Pag-ibig Fortune Cookie." Before the end of the year on December 23, the group had their first mini-concert at Movie Stars Cafe in Quezon City.

MNL48 started 2019 with a bang, joining their sister groups at the AKB48 Group Asia Festival in Impact Arena in Bangkok, Thailand. The group's Second Generation began in February and March, with 20 new members being selected. In March, they released a third single, "365 Araw ng Eroplanong Papel," and held their sold-out concert, MNL48 First Generation: Living the Dream the Concert, at New Frontier Theater in April.

In July, the group released the Tagalog version of AKB48's "Kimi wa Melody," titled "Ikaw ang Melody," as their fourth single. The last quarter of the year proved to be a milestone for the group, as they signed an exclusive contract with ABS-CBN alongside the K-pop group MOMOLAND in October. They also released their fifth single, "High Tension."

"With over 100 members having come and gone since their debut, **MNL48 show no signs of slowing down**"

Before 2019 ended, MNL48's Abby Trinidad performed with AKB48 and other sister group members on the *NHK Kouhaku Uta Gassen* Japanese New Year's Eve TV special. Abby Trinidad represented the group, singing a line of "Koisuru Fortune Cookie" in Tagalog. She became only the third Filipino performer on the Kouhaku stage, following Gary Valenciano in 1990 and Smokey Mountain in 1991.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 proved to be a challenging year for MNL48. Early in the year, auditions for the group's Third Generation were held, alongside the introduction of a new promotion-demotion system, which replaced the forced graduations format.

In September, MNL48, in partnership with Tower Records Japan, announced their first-ever sub-unit, BABY BLUE, composed of Jan Elaurza, Coleen Trinidad, and Amy Isidto. The trio debuted with the single "Sweet Talking Sugar." On November 2, the group released their sixth single, "River," after delays due to national calamities. Then, on December 23, they dropped their first original song, "HASHLOVE," a pop/R&B track celebrating Christmas.

On March 17, 2021, it was announced that MNL48 would join fellow P-pop groups BINI and BGYO, along with other Star Music and Star Hunt artists, for the "Big 4 Hours" live stream two days later. In December, for the first time in a while, they held an on-site event, the MNL48 Mini Handshake Event, at Novotel in Quezon City.

As COVID-19 restrictions eased, 2022 became a "comeback" year for live events. In April, MNL48 released their seventh single, "No Way Man," a Tagalog version of AKB48's song. Later on, they joined the first Pinoy Pop Convention (PPOPCON) in July at the New Frontier Theater and Smart Araneta Coliseum, performing alongside SB19, BINI, BGYO, ALAMAT, Press Hit Play, and 4th Impact. In October, MNL48 became the first Filipino idol group to appear on Indonesian television, performing with JKT48 on the TikTok For You Stage special on RCTI. In 2024, promoted members became part of the Fourth Generation during MNL48's 6th Anniversary event. Just in time for the Philippine Independence Day on June 12, they released their eighth single and second original song, "Summertime."

2025 is set to be a period of growth and rebirth for MNL48. With over 100 members having come and gone since their debut, the group shows no signs of slowing down. As they march toward a new era and vision, April 2025 saw the launch of MNL48 Inc., a new company based in Japan and the Philippines under LiveBuzz Productions, marking the end of their partnership with Hallo Hallo Entertainment.

The highly anticipated comeback, Reboot & Rise 2025, took place on April 27 at SM City North Edsa. It served as a mini-festival celebration and send-off to the graduating members. In preparation for the next generation of idols, MNL48 have opened auditions this year, which began on May 5. Idol hopefuls who are passionate about singing, dancing, and performing are more than welcome to try out.

Despite the challenges they've faced, MNL48 remain determined to start fresh and move forward with their Fifth Generation. As they continue to evolve, the group's journey reflects their commitment to growth and their promise to showcase Filipino talent on a global stage, ushering in an exciting new chapter for both the group and their fans. b

MNL48: Rise, Reinvention, and Rebirth

Creating a blueprint for the dedicated P-pop culture we know today, MNL48 have showcased their ability to rise against challenges and bridge gaps between diverse cultures

BY RALPH REGIS

When we talk about the rise of P-pop and "Filipino idol culture" in the mid-to-late 2010s, a group that may have gone over most people's radar is MNL48, the official Philippine sister group of the best-selling, beloved Japanese idol collective AKB48. Hailed as one of the pioneers of P-pop and an OPM act that bridges the gap between local and international audiences, MNL48 have undergone changes, challenges, and everything in between.

As is common in Japanese idol culture, MNL48 evolved with multiple lineup changes, having members leave, graduate, or be dismissed. However, despite these, their longevity proved to be a testament to their adaptability.

It was on March 26, 2016, during the encore of the AKB48 Shuku Takahashi Minami Graduation "148.5cm no Mita Yume" graduation concert in Yokohama Stadium, that the seeds were planted for the group's formation. A video revealed that AKB48 would launch overseas sister groups around Asia, which include BNK48 in Thailand, TPE48 in Taiwan, and of course, MNL48 in the Philippines.

In December, the members of AKB48 Team 8 visited the Philippines and introduced the concept of MNL48 to the general public, launching the MNL48 app, which became essential for aspiring applicants who wanted to take their shot at stardom. In September 2017, Hallo Hallo Entertainment, the agency behind MNL48, signed an agreement to partner with ABS-CBN Corporation, with the registration and audition tour dates for the group's First Generation members announced a month later.

The search for thousands of auditionees, with girls aged 15 to 20, began in early 2018 through a talent search segment on the noontime variety show It's Showtime. Unlike other sister groups, MNL48 debuted with exactly 48 ranked members, following AKB48's Senbatsu Sousenkyo ranking system, which happens annually. Here, the fans — now

PHOTOS TAKEN FROM MNL48'S OFFICIAL WEBSITE (MNL48.PH) AND X ACCOUNT (@MNL48OFFICIAL) time. That's when I thought of pursuing performing," he shares. Axl, ever the quiet thinker, reflects: "Music comforts me, and I want to make others feel the same comfort I felt whenever I listened to it."

That shared love for music blossomed into *4Ü,* a light and youthful debut that introduced listeners to AJAA's sunny aesthetic — but also hinted at deeper emotional undercurrents.

"'Hany' is like a secret love letter," Alex explains, describing each song on the EP. "When you listen to it, you get the feeling of having a crush, but you're too shy to confess. 'Torpe' is about finally finding the courage to do it. 'Best Day Ever' is about that euphoric feeling of being with someone special, and 'Cuppy Cake' is full of thoughts and emotions we feel for that someone."

JC describes the record as "a collection of love letters," while Axl sees it as something that will "make listeners happy and reminisce about the days when they were young." For Ash, it's the simplicity of the project that makes it special: "It's very relatable and lighthearted. Even when I first heard our songs, I was just smiling and [was] already having a vision of us performing them."

More than just interpreters of pop, AJAA also dabbled in songwriting for the EP. "The four of us wrote some lyrics for 'Cuppy Cake,'" Axl shares proudly. "That experience made us want to write our own songs in the future."

Their inspirations are as varied as their personalities. Alex leans toward ballad powerhouses like Adele and John Legend. JC's playlist includes TOMORROW X TOGETHER, TREASURE, and SEVENTEEN. Axl credits VXON, ENHYPEN, NewJeans, and Sabrina Carpenter for offering "new sounds" that lift his mood. Ash mentions SB19 and their "brother group" VXON, with whom they share a close bond.

When it comes to dream collaborations, VXON is a clear favorite. "Especially *Kuya* Franz Chua, who wrote our first song 'Hany,'" Axl says. "It would be fun to make a song with them and perform together." Ash adds, "We're very close with them, so working with them would have such great chemistry!"

After *4Ü,* AJAA have released a pair of well-received singles (last year's "BES I LUV U" and the more recent "Dedma"), yet despite their youth and still-modest discography, the four members are already thinking about legacy. "We want AJAA to be known more and for people to like our music," JC shares. "All we want is to raise P-pop." Axl keeps it simple: *"Sana magpasaya pa kami ng ibang tao."* Alex dreams of global recognition, saying, "I hope our music will be known worldwide and we can share more bubbly, fun, and lovely music with all of you."

But perhaps the most powerful part of AJAA is what they've found in each other.

"What I really love about being in AJAA is that we share one goal and one dream together," affirms Alex. JC calls it "a dream come true," while Axl is grateful that he gets to do what he loves "with my lovely members." Ash, ever sentimental, puts it best: "Being in AJAA in general is probably what I love the most. Performing with them and getting to experience new things together — that's what makes it all worth it." b

> **"What I really love about being in AJAA is that we share one goal and one dream together"**
>
> ALEX

DREAMING BIG Despite being barely two years old as a group, AJAA have grand aspirations of doing international shows, with both Alex and Axl wishing they could perform at Coachella one day

AJAA: Four Boys, One Dream

With bright melodies, mutual goals, and their hearts on their sleeves, AJAA are charting their own course in the exciting world of P-pop

BY JASON CABALLA

In a pop landscape brimming with talent, it takes more than just good looks and catchy hooks to leave a mark. For AJAA — the four-member P-pop boy group under Cornerstone Entertainment — it's the shared passion, genuine chemistry, and wide-eyed wonder that make them not just a promising act, but one to root for.

Formed through a rigorous training system and introduced to the public via their debut EP *4Ü* in 2023, AJAA (an acronym of the members' names Alex, JC, Axl, and Ash) came together not as overnight stars, but as dreamers with different beginnings and one common goal.

"When we first met, I thought they were all introverts," Alex recalls. "But when I got to know them deeply, I found out that they were really easygoing and fun to be with." JC echoes that initial awkwardness, saying, *"Nung una, akala ko talaga hindi ko sila makakasundo, pero sa katagalan, nakilala naman namin ang isa't isa* — and I think that's the essence of being together always."

While their bond blossomed over time, their passion for music was something each member carried long before AJAA came into the picture.

"I was just a guy living a simple life, making dance covers in our living room," JC shares. "Now that I'm a member of AJAA, I've gained a greater appreciation for who I am because of the people who stand by me."

Alex came from an acting background, but music was always close to his heart. "Acting and being an idol are both performing, and both are my dreams. Being in the showbiz and music industry felt like this was really for me," he says.

Ash, on the other hand, pivoted from a childhood dream of becoming a pilot to performing after realizing the financial constraints of aviation school. "I thought of something I could do and enjoy at the same

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ENZO SANTOS

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALEXIS DAVE CO

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DRINK DAILY
LOCALLY
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ABCDE
LOCALLY
PINK GUAVA
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LOCALLY
CALAMANSI
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Whichever comes first

HYUNDAI

billboard PHILIPPINES

VOLUME XI | YEAR 2

P-POP THEN AND NOW

The pioneering
MNL48 and the
boys of AJAA

P-POP TO THE WORLD

What SB19 and
BINI's tours mean
to the OPM industry

TAKIN' OVER

G22: ON THEIR WAY TO
PINOY POP STARDOM

P250

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